SIN/ACTION

EA-8

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

Pol 14 VIETS
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A-216 NO.

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AIR POUCH HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO : BANGKOK, VIENTIANE, CINCPAC, DANANG

EXCISE

FROM : AMEMBASSY SAIGON

SUBJECT : Youth, Students, and Elections

REF : A. Saigon A-197; B. Saigon 6734; C. Saigon 6735; D. Saigon 7006

RECEIVED
Action Taken
Date of Action
Action Office Symbol
Name of Officer

1160
JDR
WHM
RAT

DATE: September 26, 1967

Reference A described recent developments in student protests against rigged elections; references B and C described the demonstration of September 24 and the open letter from the students to President Johnson. Reference D analyses the relationship of student protesters to other political forces, and their likely impact on the current political situation. This airgram summarizes events and developments from reference A to the present.

September 17 - Representatives of Saigon, Can Tho, and Van Hanh Universities Student Union Permanent Committees met in Saigon and decided to have a general meeting of their unions in Saigon September 24.

On the same day Saigon Letters Faculty Student Group announced general meeting on elections to be held September 21. Viet-Nam Press report of this announcement noted that Letters students had asked Ministry of Education to delay their certificate examinations two weeks from the 18th; the Ministry granted only one week postponement.

September 19 - Song newspaper article quoted Faculty of Letters Student Group Chairman and Anti-Fraudulent Election Student Group Chairman Kien Be as attacking Truong dinh Dzu. Be was reported to have said, "The more the students see of Truong dinh Dzu, the more we realize he's even trickier than the press has said. We are going to launch a movement to kick out Truong dinh Dzu to counter the public impression that he's leading the students." (Comment: student protesters have continued to maintain they are acting independently.)

September 21 - Faculty of Letters students held scheduled meeting, with the usual denunciations of the election and of American "interference"

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 12/24/81
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

in Vietnamese internal affairs, and calls for peace. About 500 students attended; defeated presidential candidates Dzu, Hoang co Binh and Vu hong Khanh and two defeated senatorial candidates spoke at the meeting, as did several students. Despite the anti-American theme of discussion and rather heated tone of some speakers, Embassy officer who attended meeting was treated with personal friendliness which Vietnamese typically show to individual Americans; several students on fringes of crowd teasingly asked him if he would like to make a speech following Trung dinh Dzu (he declined). Students called on candidates for Lower House election to withdraw in anticipation of further frauds but only two (Phung van Phung and Pham van Thung) did so. Moreover, several former leaders of student struggles against Diem and Nguyen Khanh are maintaining their candidacies; even those attending meeting passed up obvious chance to affirm solidarity with student protesters. At close of meeting Kien Be announced there would be another meeting at the Law Faculty September 23.

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September 22 - Embassy officer talked privately with [redacted] who explained thinking behind current student position and course of action. On charges of American interference in the elections, he said that the Johnson Administration is losing popularity because of its handling of the war, and wanted Thieu and Ky to win to show it had chosen (sic) the right people. On the other hand, US wanted Thieu-Ky to get only 35% of vote so we would have a good excuse to change governments if we should decide to change policies. At various times [redacted] repeated other currently popular notions; that Truong dinh Dzu was supported by the CIA; that the US Mission was divided, with Gen. Westmoreland backing Thieu-Ky and Ambassador Bunker supporting a civilian candidate; that the US backed "hawk" Pham huy Co and "dove" Dzu to find out which policy the Vietnamese preferred, etc. Be then said that even in cities there had been some election fraud; in provinces, out of sight of observers, there had undoubtedly been more, boosting Thieu-Ky total from real 15% to announced 35%. Be admitted there is no direct evidence to prove US involvement in VN elections, and not enough evidence before the Assembly to reduce the Thieu-Ky vote below that of second-ranking Dzu. But he said students are against all fraud and are boycotting exams and classes, and might demonstrate in orderly manner, to pressure Assembly to invalidate election. If Assembly validates election, students probably will protest further to "show that students oppose all fraud, and that the Assembly is responsible before history for its actions." [redacted] said that if there were demonstrations they would be orderly and that students would be on guard against agitators who sought to incite violence, but he admitted that he did not fully trust even the other members of the Student Committee Against Rigged Elections, which he heads. [redacted] said he did not want Viet Cong or North Viet-Nam to take over in South Viet-Nam, or to take advantage of the student peace offensive, but he feels students must do what they can to influence Vietnamese and American public opinion toward peace instead of further escalation. He claimed that the elections show a majority

of Vietnamese people support peace but Thieu and Ky do not; the US also has a majority for peace but hawks -- including military, arms manufacturers and war profiteers -- are still the most influential forces in determining US policy.

September 23 - Morning meeting at Law Faculty did not take place, and Law Faculty's Student Committee issued a letter explaining that the meeting had been called by Saigon Student Union Chairman Ho huu Nhut without the agreement of Law students. The letter roundly castigated the September 3 election as a "cynical and fraudulent gesture" toward the people; attacked the "unconstitutional bargaining for power" now going on within the Armed Forces Council; claimed that the Thieu-Ky conflict is making Vietnamese politics "rotten"; demanded that the Assembly find the courage to invalidate the September 3 election; and while describing Americans as "comrades-in-arms to defeat Communism," "harshly warned" the US against "activities contrary to Vietnamese national sovereignty." However, the letter urged law students to maintain a calm position because "the Viet-Nam war situation is now in an uneven phase and there are unexpected and contradictory reports among the people, especially the opinion that a General has bought a certain group of people to stir up trouble to help him in his bargaining for power; Ho huu Nhut refused on July 9 to join us in a communique urging Generals Thieu and Ky to resign, therefore Nhut's sudden courage in recent days is hard to understand." In closing Law Students Group promised to "decisively smash" all plots against the people but "because of the honor of the students and the national interests we are determined to carry out only those activities which, after careful reflection, we deem suitable in the present war situation." Comment: the reference to July 9 communique is unclear; both Law Student communique of July 8 and Saigon Students Union communique of July 9 call for resignation of all military and civil servant candidates during campaign period, but neither referred to Thieu and Ky by name. In any case, the letter clearly implies that Nhut and SSU are tools of Ky and Loan.

On the same day the Can Tho Students Union Permanent Committee decided the elections had been fraudulent and urged the Assembly to invalidate them. Letters students in Saigon once again asked, and were denied, further delay in exams scheduled for week September 25. Since the students had sworn to boycott exams anyway, the request for delay was an implicit confession of faint heart in student ranks, especially among students who, if they fail this second and last exam, do not advance to the next class and become subject to military draft. Protesting students are also supposed to be boycotting classes, but classes do not start until early October.

September 24 - The morning meeting, the open letter to President Johnson, and the brief demonstration have been described in references B and C; we now have additional information. Youth leaders who were present told us that SSU Chairman Ho huu Nhut claimed that the Law Students had misunderstood his refusal to sign the joint communique of July 9; Nhut explained that he had thought the law students were acting on behalf of Tran van Huong, who was then thought to be the leading civilian candidate who would profit most from a Thieu-Ky resignation. Song newspaper reports that defeated Presidential candidates Dzu, Khanh, and Binh and defeated Senatorial candidate Pham Thai took part in the discussion, and that open letters were sent to UN Secretary-General U Thant and to the Assembly as well as to President Johnson. Truong dinh Dzu said that the Senate election had also been rigged and that the new Senate was filled with Can Lao. The call for a demonstration arose, apparently spontaneously, from several students in the hall. Hoang co Binh and Pham Thai did take part in the demonstration. At the Assembly hall a symbolic "fraudulent ballot box" was burned and the Assembly was urged to invalidate the September 3 election. We were told later by [ ] that the Buddhist demonstration at the Central Market the same day was coordinated with the student march up Tu Do Street to the Assembly, in order to spread the police thin. [ ] said the September 24 demonstration was a test of police and crowd reaction. However, we understand from other sources that the police had given advance permission for an orderly demonstration.

September 25 - Threatened boycotts of the Faculty of Letters examinations did not take place and the examinations went ahead.

September 26 - The Faculty of Letters examinations went ahead with a face-saving agreement between the Dean and the Letters Students Group, who acceded to the Dean's request that they drop their boycott to permit civil servants and military men from the provinces who had come to Saigon for the examination to go ahead and take it.

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